MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

NOAA
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NORTHEAST REGION
HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION

JULY 2003

GLOUCESTER, MA OFFICE, ONE BLACKBURN DRIVE, GLOUCESTER, MA 01930

FOUR ELECTRIC CABLES PROPOSED FOR VINALHAVEN, ME

Four electric cables are proposed to replace existing cables to Vinalhaven, ME. The cables will originate in Glen Cove (Rockport) and land in Wooster Cove (Vinalhaven). The right of way will cross lobster and shellfish habitat as well as eelgrass meadows. Concerns for impacts on aquatic resources are generally focused on construction methods and timing of cable placement. NOAA Fisheries recommended an EFH assessment be completed and this project be reviewed as an Individual Permit to properly assess impacts and alternatives. **(sean.mcdermott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9113)**

EVERETT EXTENSION PROJECT ROUTE ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

At a meeting on July 9th with the Army Corp of Engineers (ACOE), Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and federal and state resource agencies, the Algonquin Gas Transmission Company proposed an alternative route for the Everett Extension. The original route was planned to extend from the main pipeline to Everett via Deer Island and under a runway for Logan Airport. The proposed alternative would land in the Revere Beach area using horizontal directional drilling and utilize street access to Everett. The alternative avoids intertidal and valuable shellfish habitat. Further resource information is needed to evaluate potential impacts for both routes. **(sean.mcdermott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9113)**

LNG TERMINAL PROPOSED ALONG TAUNTON RIVER

Weaver's Cove Energy, LLC has proposed the construction of a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) import facility on the Taunton River in Fall River, MA. This project includes the maintenance and improvement dredging of up to 2.1 million cubic yards of material for a turning basin and navigational channel. The Taunton River serves as EFH for Winter flounder, and is important for passage of the anadromous Alewife, Blueback herring, and Rainbow smelt. Weaver's Cove Energy, LLC has submitted an expanded Environmental Notification Form at the state level, and plans to submit an EIS by the end of 2003. An expanded EFH Assessment will be required for this project. **(Chris Boelke, 978/ 281-9131)**

WINTHROP BEACH RESTORATION PROJECT

The Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) has proposed the removal of up to 100 acres of sand and small cobble from Massachusetts Bay as part of the Winthrop beach nourishment project. This area has been identified as EFH for 26 federally managed species including Atlantic cod, Haddock, Pollock, and White hake. With assistance of the Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) and other federal and state resource agencies, the MDC is in the process of developing a biological sampling plan to determine species presence, potential habitat conversion, and anticipated habitat recovery. The MDC will be submitting an expanded EFH assessment along with final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment. **(Chris Boelke, 978/ 281-9131)**

JAMES J. HOWARD MARINE SCIENCES LABORATORY, HIGHLANDS, NJ 07732

NEW YORK WATERWAYS - NEW JERSEY TRANSIT FERRY PROJECT

The HCD staff attended a meeting with the New York District ACOE, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), NJ Transit, and representatives of New York Waterways to discuss the proposed Port Imperial Intermodal Ferry Terminal to be located in a cove on the Hudson River in Weehawken, New Jersey. A public notice for the project was recently issued by the ACOE. The proposed project involves the dredging of 9.2 acres of shallow water habitat and the construction of a 31,286 square foot (sf) pile supported platform for the ferry terminal, and the installation of 2,165 sf of ramps, and 7,000 square feet of floating barges. Scoping for this project began in 1999. Since then, HCD has consistently recommended that an alternate location, such as the site of the existing ferry terminal be used to eliminate the need for dredging shallow water habitat and the construction of a new pile supported structure in the cove. HCD recommended that the ACOE deny authorization of a proposal to conduct the dredging and to install a temporary facility in the cove in 2002. The NJDEP does not consider the dredging to be maintenance dredging under their Coastal Zone Management Rules and will require mitigation for the loss of the shallow water habitat. HCD will review the Environmental Assessment and provide the ACOE with the appropriate comments in the coming weeks. **(Karen Greene, 732/ 872-3023**)

PHILADELPHIA AIRPORT (PHL) CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT (CEP)

This project consists of major airfield improvements, including the construction of one or more new runways and related facilities, to reduce existing and projected delays. PHL is the 19th busiest airport in the nation. To address project airfield capacity needs, the airport undertook a comprehensive Master Plan, a part of which is a major airfield redevelopment project. The PHLCEP is one of thirteen transportation projects that Transportation Secretary Mineta has chosen for expedited environmental review under Executive Order 13274 (EO), Environmental Stewardship and Transportation Infrastructure Project Review; and which will be monitored by the Transportation Infrastructure Streamlining Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force will assist agencies in an expedited environmental review process under NEPA and related laws. The City of Philadelphia, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and the review agencies will be working together to integrate individual responsibilities, to collaborate on environmental stewardship, and to fulfill responsibilities concurrently, rather than sequentially. The Philadelphia Airport was chosen as a priority project because it is identified as an airport of

national significance and is considered important to the national transportation system. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the CEP will evaluate the No Build Alternative and two "families" of alternatives. The Parallel Alternative concept adds a runway to the existing airfield layout. The Diagonal Alternative concept involves 3 to 4 new runways in a new orientation, 20 degrees clockwise from the existing alignment. One alternative would require substantial fill in the Delaware River and the other could increase noise impacts above significance thresholds for hundreds of residences. **(anita.riportella@noaa.gov , 732/ 872-3116 and Stanley.W.Gorski@noaa.gov, 732/ 842-3037)**

MILFORD, CT OFFICE, 212 ROGERS AVENUE, MILFORD, CT 06460

MARINA DEVELOPMENT INCREASING FROM SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND TO THE MID-ATLANTIC

Marina development activities are increasing. A number of people in the recreational boating industry report that one effect of the events of 9/11 has been a surge in boating along the northeastern coast. This is evidenced by boat sales and registration statistics, particularly vessels in the 26 to 35 foot range. While 18 to 25 foot boats continue to dominate the market, the larger group has shown a significant increase in numbers. In the mega-yacht category, we see a similar but proportional trend. Yachts in the 75 to 150 foot length are now commonly seen between Cape Cod and New York City. Along with the increased presence and use of recreational water craft is a companion and significant change in the attitudes of the boaters. Power boaters in particular are seeking "destination sites" and the comforts of landside facilities at those sites for their boating experience. This means more pressure on transitory marina facilities at destination sites such as the coastal Islands and other scenic ports. Compounding the pressures created by those shifts is the trend toward group cruises that bring a number of vessels into a port. The Cruisers typically seek adjacent or nearby berths and a diversity of landside facilities. In response, destination site marinas are seeking more and larger slips with enhanced infrastructure and services that highlight the benefits of berths over moorings. The impacts of expanding marina space over mooring area creates some interesting issues. Not the least is the reduced likelihood that berthed mariners will discharge "head" wastes into local waters. This is partially explained by the availability of "pumpout" facilities dockside. However, with the designation and monitoring of "no discharge" zones and the availability of state and federal grants for shoreside and vessel mounted pumpout facilities, waste discharge events are being eliminated from most coastal waters. **(Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6594)**

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PROPOSES DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Staff recently completed with the National Park Service (NPS), their proposal to perform a marsh restoration demonstration project in the Gateway National Recreational Area's Jamaica Bay element. The project features local dredging from a natural creek with spray dispersal on degraded areas at Big Egg Marsh. Portions of the area will be planted after the elevations are raised in the demonstration area. The NPS will monitor their site to measure the efficacy of the activities. Conservation recommendations were provided to the NPS as part of our essential fish habitat coordination. **(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6571)**

PORT IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS DOMINATE DREDGING REQUESTS

Port improvement continues to dominate the dredging activities in the Rhode Island to New York region. Work in the Providence River, RI; Ports in New London, New Haven, Bridgeport and Norwalk, CT as well as the Port of New York and New Jersey have or will tie up so much dredging equipment that scheduling is being impacted. Because Port maintenance and improvement projects tend to require a protracted period of time (measured in months to years) for relocating the millions of cubic yards of sediment involved, all operational constraints are being reviewed. We are seeing that non-attainment of designated air quality levels is a major problem. Another issue is cost effectiveness as mobilization and demobilization costs can become major complications to an action. One of the consequences of those problems/pressures is that EFH Conservation Recommendations that limit the window in which dredging can occur are being scrutinized. While most agree that the issue is not often the conservation recommendations, resource protections are the easiest restrictions to overcome and so, they are usually the first topics in a negotiation session. We have been fortunate in working with the New York and New England Districts and finding solutions that allow aquatic resource protections to remain in place and construction activities to proceed. Sequential dredging shifts equipment to portions of projects during periods that do not possess species or life stages of focus resources, and collection, and application of resource and dredging interaction insights have been key to our successes. While not all situations result in amicable solutions, it is important to note that failures are an infrequent and unusual conclusion of the negotiations between engineers and ecologists. **(Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6594)**

NEW YORK DISTRICT TO DREDGE THE MATTITUCK HARBOR FEDERAL NAVIGATION PROJECT

Staff has begun the necessary coordination with the New York District, ACOE for this federal navigation project maintenance activity. The proposed work includes 10,000-15,000 cubic yards of dredging with beach placement. The material will be removed using a pipeline dredge, mechanical dredge or similar plant. The ACOE has indicated the work will be completed after September 15 and before February 1. **(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6571)**

OXFORD, MD OFFICE, 904 SOUTH MORRIS ST, OXFORD, MD 21654

ARMY CREEK, DE, RESTORATION

A restoration plan for Army Creek Landfill, a Superfund site in New Castle Co., was completed in October 1995, and baseline biological information was collected in 1996. However, before restoration was initiated, another contaminant, mirex, was found buried in uplands adjacent to the wetland restoration area. Following several years of remedial investigations, it was found that the mirex had not migrated into wetlands. Inert, but floatable, pellets used in the manufacture of latex were found in the wetlands. Although the pellets are not toxic, they are deemed a hazard to feeding waterfowl, and are to be removed prior to restoration. The remedial work plan is to be distributed to the Trustees in mid-August for review. Remediation is to begin in January, and is estimated to take 6 to 12 months to complete, which may delay restoration until 2005. When complete, the Army Creek proposal will result in the restoration of 225 acres of tidal marsh, and 2.5 miles of tidal creek. **(Tim Goodger, 410/ 226-5723)**

CRASSOSTREA ARIAKENSIS UPDATE

C. ariakensis is an Asian oyster in which there is a growing interest to culture in the waters of Chesapeake Bay. This oyster is fast growing and disease resistant, which many believe makes this species an ideal candidate to replace the steadily declining stocks of the native oyster, C. virginica. Norfolk District, ACOE, has recently issued a permit to the Virginia Seafood Council to conduct a demonstration project using genetically produced triploid (sterile) ariakensis at a limited number of sites. Maryland's governor, in a recent press conference, stated his state's interest in introducing ariakensis, as well, and an application has been submitted to the Baltimore District, ACOE. The National Academy of Science has recently completed an evaluation of the potential ecological risks of introducing this exotic oyster into Chesapeake Bay, which will be unveiled to the public on August 14 in Annapolis. An Ad Hoc Panel was formed under the auspices of the Chesapeake Bay Program to review the VA proposal, and subsequently made numerous recommendations to alleviate potential adverse environmental impacts of that proposal. The Panel will reconvene later in August to evaluate the MD proposal. Preparation of an EIS is anticipated before any wide-scale introduction of ariakensis is permitted. **(Tim Goodger, 410/ 226-5723)**